

Ross Dowson archives – correspondence – Year 1989

- 03_00 Article in *Left Caucus Newsletter*, “Labor opens debate on NDP future;” from a speech by RD after CAW leader Bob White’s attack on Ed Broadbent’s electoral failure to counter free trade and his betrayal of NDP principles; a widespread debate opening up
- 04_10 Letter to Steve B., C.A.W Local 112, Downsview, ON, re: RD’s growing difficulties in presenting left-wing resolutions in his riding; the rightward swing of the Broadbent leadership; his own suffering from hydrocephalus
- 05_23 Letter to Anne (D.), re: Dowson family activities and problems; his own medical condition; Angie Codina’s activities in Hong Kong; the NDP becoming an electoral machine
- 05_26 Letter to Tour America (Walnut Publishing) San Francisco, re: request to *Socialist Action*; meeting of a coalition to rehabilitate the victims of the Moscow Trials

(In August 1989 Ross Dowson suffered a debilitating stroke and was unable to further communicate with comrades and family. He was never able to recover and died in February 2002—ed.)

August 8, 1990 Declaration of the Forward Group, one year after Ross Dowson was incapacitated, on the occasion of the announcement of the Communist League in Canada (formerly the LSA), and the SWP in the USA that they had left the Fourth International; the Forward Group carries on the tradition of the Trotskyist movement since its birth under the leadership of Maurice Spector and Jack MacDonald; the Forward Group reaffirms the validity of the theory of permanent revolution and Trotskyism.

Left Caucus newsletter

March 1989

Vol. 3 No. 1



Labor opens debate on NDP future

By Ross Dowson

St. David-St. George NDP

Notes from an introductory comment by Ross Dowson to a Toronto Conference organized by the Ontario NDP Left Caucus initiating its participation in the debate on the lessons of the November 1988 federal elections.

The debate has been launched with a blistering attack by Autoworkers President Bob White against Ed Broadbent. This debate which has no precedent in the history of Canada's labor party broke out right after the election with the publication of an article on White's contribution titled "Lost Opportunity" in the December 7, 1988 *The Toronto Star*.

The seven page critique by White who is chairperson of the Canadian Labor Congress's Political Action Committee and a vice-president of both the NDP and the Labor Congress, appeared *in toto* in the January issue of *Our Times*, at the same time as the appearance of a critical 12-page contribution over the signatures of Gerard Docquier, national director of the United Steelworkers of America and Leo Gerard, USWA District 6, Director. Steel pioneered inde-

pendent labor political action. Auto is now its most dynamic partisan with White having been designated by Broadbent as his heir-apparent.

While White declares that the comments in his letter are his own, it is clear that they have wide currency in the party's ranks. "I can tell you," he declares, "that I have never seen such a level of disappointment and anger among our activists, leaders of the labor movement and candidates, at how the party strategists conducted the campaign...There is a common thread in the frustration, and that is that the NDP, our party, never really came to grips with the importance of free trade, were scared of it as an election platform, and while it was mentioned in the campaign, it certainly did not get the priority or attention or the emotion that it deserved." "In the labor movement itself there is also a feeling that while labor is an important partner with the other groups inside the NDP, its financial and people-support is accepted gratefully, but its ideas and leadership are completely ignored. It goes even further than that. There are some who have the feeling that during the recent election campaign, the leader's tour was structured in such a fashion as to distance itself from the labor movement both in appearance and issues."

The Steelworkers' leadership scored the party leadership's strategists for basing their campaign on three inter-related premises: "1) that the Liberals were in a state of collapse, 2) that if free trade were to become a central issue, the Liberals would be the sole political beneficiaries, and 3) it would be possible to low-ball free trade through the campaign." Thus "the campaign made fundamental errors in tactics and strategy and in the process betrayed the principles on which the NDP is based."

To the protests of the top spokespersons of the trade union movement against the Broadbent strategists should be added some of the criticism that appeared during the campaign itself in the Left Caucus Newsletter: that the leadership failed to present the NDP as seeking to form a majority government under its own banner but on several occasions, under the authority of Broadbent himself, talked in terms of forming coalition governments, sometimes in alliance with the Liberals and other times with the Tories. That on the eve of the election the federal council made a public display of the crudest oppor-

tunism, undermining the party's antiwar stance by dumping its longstanding commitment to withdrawal from the U.S.-dominated NATO/NORAD military alliances. Faced with the Tories' demagogic attempt to present "free trade" as a vision of the future Canada and as a leap of faith in Canada, the NDP leadership failed to counterpose socialism -- a policy of public ownership and a planned economy under popular democratic control, but just a blank negative No vote.

Other well-known NDPers are now speaking up and more are certain to do so. Among them are the re-elected Ontario MP, Howard McCurdy (Windsor-Lake St. Clair), Howard Pawley, former leader of the Manitoba NDP who contested the federal riding of Selkirk and David Orlikow, whose defeat in Winnipeg

North ended a 26 years tenure along with the defeat in Winnipeg North Centre which had been held by the CCF-NDP since the days of J.S. Woodsworth and the Winnipeg General Strike. The ex-premier of Manitoba denounced Broadbent's election strategy of down-playing the free trade issue. "The party's strategists failed to respond to changes during the campaign. The party spread itself too thin, particularly when it became clear free trade was the issue in the election." According to the **Saskatchewan Commonwealth**, "while Orlikow agrees with White and Pawley, he feels that Broadbent should shoulder part of the blame for the election results."

The debate is now underway. The party is moving towards its summer convention. It would seem probable that failing to win the post as leader of the parliamentary opposition with its many perks and handsome salary, Broadbent will take his posh pension and retire from the House and leadership of the party. That would immediately set off a leadership contest. Such a contest could completely swamp the necessary political debate with a leadership popularity contest. That is why the political discussions must get well underway at once. Discussions must be slated, resolutions passed, delegates elected and interventions prepared in every constituency association and every union local, and force the issues raised by White and others up front and centre.

White demands open debate

By Ross Dowson

St. David-St. George

Along with a quite unprecedented, trenchant and public criticism of the party's federal election campaign strategy by a leader of the party and one of its most dynamic affiliates, president of the Canadian Auto Workers Bob White calls for a full debate within the party -- "a debate which must commence immediately while events are still fresh in everyone's mind." He brushed aside such traditional platitudes as "lotta continua" (the struggle goes on), about "bleeding a while and rising to fight again." "We need," he emphasizes, "after we have had the appropriate discussion about election 1988, a thorough discussion and examination of where we go from here."

"Can we seriously say we will be building to form a national government soon? Are we going to be a party that clearly identifies with working people? What really is the role of the labor movement inside the party? How can we in future campaigns insure that the leader, the tour and the strategists are not insulated from other points of view?", he challenges.

There are many matters that should be considered - a pan-Canadian journal with serious contributions from any and all unions, any affiliate or associate body, information and opinions on the global struggle, the organization of the NDP political action committees in the union locals, solidarity committees, cultural groups, etc. Since some locals and clubs do not on their own have the resources, the Ontario Left Caucus will be shortly announcing a series of forums dealing with suggested themes and topics. The first series will be a response to the call for assistance in formulating "an integrated economic policy for the federal organization" Based on a resolution passed by the 1987 Federal Convention the PRC has invited submissions on such concerns as - "the connections between local economic initiatives and national economy- the exploration of new democratic and decentralized models of public ownership- the development of specific proposals reflecting a commitment to affirmative action to guarantee that women will realize new opportunities for jobs, economic equity for minorities..." etc., etc.

The committee has suggested that submissions be about five pages and received before April, by the Federal Policy coordinator Brian McKee at 600-280 Albert St., Ottawa K1P 5G8. The schedule of the ONDP Left Caucus forums will be available by contacting us at our post office box number.

Ross Dowson, 1809
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April 10, 1989

Steve Benedict
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Dear Steve

Thanks very much for sending me the copy of Bob White's post election comments and now -From Defeat to ~~Renewal~~ Renewal; You will see from the enclosed copy of the Left Caucus Newsletter we have already published considerable of the first document -no doubt the editors will be deciding to publish "From Defeat. The first document was in my opinion and will be in the Left Caucus very good. But "From Defeat" was superb. Just the right tone and very educational. CAW must be building a real team. It would be good to be in the shop with you to hear what is being said on the floor. I hope it is being circulated wide and not only in CAW but throughout the union movement and including all the NDP across Canada. It should open up a discussion the like of which has not been seen before. We need this in the worst way. Discussion has become a stranger in the NDP ridings. At one time Rosedale-St George-St David's used to attempt them and even have convention resolutions discussions but in the recent years I had the demoralizing experience of facing a gang up against anything that I would propose and the most stupid arguments against anything I tried to open up were encouraged and entertained. The executive has been a solid block for some while under the direction of John Goyeau. They even held pre-convention resolution executive meetings so that I could present my drafts so that they really could line up the members. They tolerate no middle ground and soon I became such a focus of concern that I felt that I had to pull back from both the provincial and federal riding meetings. I have always taken a heavy load of canvassing and posing signs and working intensively with the few new persons who always turn up.

Yes there are always new persons and the odd old timer turning up but they soon drift away because the atmosphere is so stultifying. As you probably most ridings meet once a year strike off an executive and the delegates to the provincial council. This year, very short we will be electing delegates for the federal convention. Heretofore almost anyone who wanted to go and could afford it became a delegate but things may be quite different this year what with the leadership contest and the political issues that the White documents will no doubt inspire from some ridings. The last couple of conventions NATO and NORAD were big issues--made so by the Broadbent leadership by their tireless efforts to dump official policy. The Broadbent leadership will no doubt try to get prettified versions of their new policy statement on NATO-NORAD and defence through the convention but then again they back away and hope they can satisfy everyone by just coming out against Ottawa's nuclear subs project and so evade the more fundamental question that they in effect support Canada's involvement in the arms drive

I won't be going out to the convention this year but if I am able will play a bit part in the preparatory work in Rosedale if it should hold a meeting. I am right now waiting to get a second opinion with regards to an operation the chief neurologist at the Western Hospital favors. I am partially demobilized by hydrocephalus -popularly known as water on the brain-hence all the errors in typing this note which I really wanted to be a letter to you. Are you going to participate in Rosedale? Why do you make a point of coming down to visit me any time at your convenience. I have an apartment on the 28th floor on this street just up from Allan Gardens one east of Jarvis. Better still phone me at your first convenience

fraternally

Ross

I did not recognize your name until I phoned your dad who I had the pleasure of meeting

Ross Dowson, #1809
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May 23, 1989

Anne Dowson

Dear Anne

Received your ~~xxxx~~ interesting letter the other day and refreshed my memory of some of the details yesterday after returning from the camp with Lois having gone down on an invitation from Marie and Vic. Yesterday was the day that we celebrate the ~~xxxx~~ opening of the season. Alas we wanted to go in to look over the display of the trilliums and the few daffodils and tulips that we had planted at your cabin and at Lois'. But we can't go in as there was a truck on the road just inside the gate and a few people moving around. Several hours later on our way out there others there. There was a lavish display of trilliums and honey suckles at Outlook beach which Vic wanted to stake out. Hwe and Marie have bought a fine vehicle and trailer which they will be taking down to Outlook and up to that other fine park north of the Ottawa highway this summer. In between we enjoyed one of Marie's fine meals with Ron and Liz's picture-book children and their grandmother. Mike had to work.

I am glad to hear that you saved the money away for the future. I understand Ottawa is now vigorously pursuing outstanding educational loans. I haven't seen either of the girls Walter for sometime now but since ~~xxxx~~ they are young I would imagine all is well. Lois now that the ever-increasing load of Ruth has been lifted off her shoulders is ~~xxxx~~ and I would ~~xxxx~~ imagine feeling much better. Jerry went up to Kipling Acres to protest the increasing pressure on Lois and what do you know-- of the the patients broke her hip and opened a vacancy which we managed to slip Ruth into. Ruth has been staying there now for two and possibly three weeks and seems to be adjusting well. Jerry took her out for a ride in his car and after a while Ruth asked him to take her back to the institution. Of course she continues to deteriorate, her memory is pretty well gone but she greets Lois, introduces her as her sister and then promptly forgets she is there. Joyce goes up fairly ~~xxxx~~ often. I haven't yet gone up. Lois thinks there is no real purpose. If she knows me it will only be a ~~xxxx~~ flash. She lives in a world from which we are pretty well now barred and it would take me several hours by public transit to get up there. Lois is now getting power of attorney and straightening up her estate--but who ~~xxxx~~ know--which ehre they have so far traced out here course quite accurately she might outlast us all.

As for me I am a problem case. I went through the special examinations that Dr Tator arranged for me a while but now it appears ~~xxxx~~ there is some fission where to go now. Tator thinks I should have the operation for ~~my~~ my diagnosis ~~hydrocephalus~~ HYDROCEPHALUS (normal pressure)-formerly known as water on the brain) but whereas before I had the impression that the operation is a dime a dozen I now hear it is tricky and has dangers--after all they are placing a shunt in the brain to drain off water through a tube into my body. My last doctor and his team of three or four challenged some other doctors' evaluation of my gait. They had a great exchange of opinion about my this and that in a vocabulary which I had only a rudimentary acquaintance with--they took some video shots of parts of me. They agreed that they wanted some Magnetic Resonance Image shots of my head but this time lower down etc etc. That is over two weeks ago and I have not heard further from them, not even of an appointment which takes a month or so to come off. It is now quite difficult for me to walk--I now have to use a cane--I can't swim because I lose my balance and might drown--putting one weight on wally wally up the stream on wally wally down the bank. But the good old Dept of Veterans Affairs has authorized me to take taxis to keep my appointments, get groceries etc. And I am doing well--no aches or pains

I had to stop the letter for what turned out to be almost two weeks. Now the hospital is underway. Tomorrow I have to go for an obituary X-ray, then Sunday evening I have to go for another MRI Scan which means that the operation is near. In the meantime the air conditioner that I ordered some while back has been delivered and I have now got it installed ready to use it first hot day which we almost got today. Wrote the Frisco comrades to see if they slotted some space for us to get in the tour that they have organized for their comrades and associated that has just return from the USSR---a couple of the Frisco comrades, Trotsky's nephew, Victor Serge's son and Ralph Schoenman of Bertrand Russell Foundation---we had earlier sent them 3 or 400 dollars to get it moving. We will try to get the York U supporters to sponsor a rally this Fall. Somewhere back Harry and Angie Codina were talking about her doing something with the Chinese comrades in Hongkong where she has an office. I didn't do anything about it--after all they have been semi-underground and she is not very experienced--ever naive. However with the big developments in Peking we got talking about it again and we agreed it would be a good experience. Well this morning Harry I and Angie had a three way conversation. She told us how she spoke along with some British LP militants. We set over by fax the latest issue of International Viewpoint along with the latest Bulletin IDUN. I took the latest issue with a major excellent article by Naadel from our post man's hands to give it for transmission through Harry's machine for Angie to read and pass around to student leaders and other representatives of the work press. There is no question she is having a big experience which could prove to be very profitable for world Trotskyism. Angie will do a good job for a you know many of the students are articulate in English. Harry told me that he gathered from her report that she did exactly what we would have said and done. Lois and Joyce are playing a big role in the abortion choice acts here--I suppose you saw the article on Joyce haddling the friends of the fetus demo as here gone.

I thought that your comments re the document that you call "the proposed constitution" were in some ways preceptive. It is too bad that Gord did not include a few introductory comments. It was designed to remind some persons here who think they are with us (out of habit) who we are actually - we want to be friends but not just for auld lang syne--we want activists. We have recruited a couple of comrades and it is very demoralizing for them to hear about some comrades who they never meet anywhere. The NDP is a real slough that does nothing but appeal for funds - and it has been having a bad impact on the Left Caucus which is not even sustain a milieu from which it can move out in the Toronto area. The leadership question which the brass is trying to use to whip up some interest only reveals the depth of the NDP's crisis. Of course Devine's privatization hit the one section where the party is very deeply rooted--and as you know whipped up a ~~workbook~~ whirlwind.

I hope you are getting International Viewpoint-- pick up again with number 164x22x
300 FF airmail 2 rue Richard Lenoir, 93108 Montreuil, FRANCE

But I must break it off--will write again shortly

with socialist greetings

Glad to

Ross

May 26, 1989

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Dear Comrades

I received your May 7 letter, the May Socialist Action and the fund appeal-
all together a vaery impressive package

I have delayed responding until now as I wished to preent it to the Forward
Group meeting which I have done.

We would like to know whether you could squeeze Toronto into the schedule,
the approximate dates and what the approximate share of the costs would be.
We have a group on one of the campuses - York University (Glendon Campus) who may
well be prepared to sponsor it and open the door for a rally at the York Campus which
is the larger of the two.

I have just glanced through the file on the modest campaign to clear the names of "the
accused in the Moscow Trials". On a March 1, 1988 leaflet we list 43 prominent Canadian
sponsors. Among them prominent lawyers, editors of well established left journals,
academics, unionists, leading feminist etc. Very impressive. The bulk of them are
from the Toronto area where ~~Toronto~~ has a long established tradition. This just
might provide the opportunity to get the various "Trotskyist" on a common wave-length
although last time Barry Wesseler created a bad smell with his sustained attack
on the International Socialists. Dave McNally... they are the largest and most dynamic
group. The Barnes-ites who are now co-publishers of the Militant would have nothing
to do with the meeting,

By counting us in you could truly, more truly say that the tour is of America since
Canada is a big slice of America, of North America.

Looking forward to hearing from you on this proposition. The best way perhaps would be for
you to phone me at the above number. I am the only ~~person~~ who would answer and you could phone
at the cheapest time--reversing the charge.

in anticipation

Ross Dowson

The Forward Group declares its solidarity with the Fourth International, the world party of revolutionary socialism.

The Fourth International carries on in the great liberatory traditions established by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky. As Stalinism suffers its most severe crisis of this century, the analysis of Leon Trotsky shines through with clarity and vision.

Trotskyism has now been thoroughly vindicated by the unfolding of history, as humanity discards the aberration of Stalinist falsification and oppression.

Yet, in the midst of this epochal crisis, the Socialist Workers Party (U.S.A.) and Communist League (Canada) have severed all their ties to the Fourth International.

This wholesale abandonment of Trotskyism reflects the utter bankruptcy of these groups, which have jettisoned their own past at the very moment that it has become most relevant and meaningful. The adaption to Castroite influences and rejection of the heritage of Leon Trotsky and his theory of the permanent revolution mark an irreversible process of degeneration of these organizations and relegate them to irrelevant sects.

We, comrades of the Forward Group, trace our lineage to the earliest leaders of the Canadian Trotskyist movement, to Maurice

Spector and Jack MacDonald, founding members of the Communist Party of Canada who, after attending the 1926 Congress of the Communist International in Moscow, returned to fight against the Stalinist degeneration of the party and founded North American Trotskyism in Canada, with Spector expelled in 1928 for his efforts. We stand by the Program of the 1921 Congress of the 3rd International, on the tradition of mass mobilizations around transitional and democratic demands and the building of a party that can unify the working class and link concrete struggles for immediate demands to the fight for socialist democracy. We trace our roots to those comrades who founded the Trotskyist movement and participated in the Left Opposition with Leon Trotsky. We march in the footsteps of Ruth Bullock, who pioneered Trotskyism in western Canada and who dedicated her whole life to build a Trotskyist vanguard. We trace our roots to Paddy Stanton and Joe Meslin (recently deceased), Trotskyist trade union militants with broad influence and respect whose contributions to Trotskyism span over half a century. We march in the footsteps of Ross Dowson, former member of the International Secretariat and a key comrade whose efforts to reunite the forces of world Trotskyism, along with Joe Hanson's from the SWP, were instrumental in founding the Reunification Congress in 1963. As the leader of Canadian Trotskyism for over 50 years, Dowson's insight and understanding enabled the Canadian movement to pioneer entry into mass labour formations resulting in the Canadian comrades experiencing a rich and extended imple-

Joe Hansen (SWP)

mentation in the Canadian labour party, the CCF - NDP since 1933. The result was a movement that was able to export cadres to England, New Zealand and Australia as well as emerge as the most significant pole of attraction in the youth radicalization in Canada in the 1960s.

When the ultra-left currents that infected the youth radicalization of the 1960s threw the Canadian official organization of the Fourth International off balance, we were obliged to sever our links with the League for Socialist Action (LSA) in 1973-74. Now that the formal successor of that organization has itself succumbed to the terminal illness of sectarianism and abandoned the last vestige of its commitment to Trotskyism as we had predicted, we proudly proclaim our solidarity with the international association which represents the historic continuity of the Trotskyist movement and traditions, the Fourth International.

Long Live the Fourth International!

Long Live Trotskyism!

August 8, 1990

The Forward Group

Per:

Harry Kopyto
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